

WAUKESHA COUNTY BEACH AND WATER REGULATIONS FLOTATION DEVICES

NO WATER FLOTATION DEVICES, SWIM SUITS WITH FLOATATION AIDS, FACE MASKS, OR DIVING EQUIPMENT OF ANY KIND PERMITTED

The following information is the basis for the above beach rule concerning flotation devices:

Much information supports the claim that swimming with personal flotation devices creates a more dangerous situation than swimming without a flotation device, especially for children. The United States Coast Guard Marine Safety Office, which approves personal flotation devices and regulates and requires their use in boats, recommends that personal flotation devices not be used for recreational swimming.

The problem in allowing children to use a personal flotation device as a recreational aid while swimming is that they do not have the weight in their legs, the muscle control, or the knowledge to stay upright in a life preserver. Children also become dependent on the preserver, and when floating into deeper water, lack the ability to maneuver back to water shallow enough so that they can touch bottom. Personal flotation devices tend to encourage children to venture into deeper water or further from the shore than their ability would permit them otherwise. This situation poses a danger in itself, as the preserver gives the child and her/ her parents a false feeling of safety and security. The best solution to the problem is not in personal flotation devices, but in teaching children to swim. Swimming lessons, used to develop ability and confidence, along with teaching a child the dangers of water so that her/she knows the limitations of his/her ability, are the best measures a parent can take to prevent drowning. Life preservers actually compound the problem as a child becomes dependent on the preserver, thus creating a false sense of security. Permitting children to wear personal flotation devices may make parents feel comfortable in leaving their children alone, and this should be discouraged. Due to the rules of the facility, a child should only be allowed to swim without parental or equivalent supervision if he/she is an experienced swimmer, or the parent is confident in his/her judgment, knowledge, respect for the water, and ability to swim. **NO ONE SHOULD EVER SWIM ALONE AS A MATTER OF SAFETY.**

Personal flotation devices also present a number of problems for the lifeguard. The first problem is that the lifeguard has no control over the types of life preservers used, thus the lifeguard cannot monitor the quality, fit, etc. Enforcement of any regulations specifying that life preservers be Coast Guard approved, the correct size, and worn properly would be extremely difficult for the lifeguard if they were to remain alert to their swim area. A great deal of time would have to be spent in enforcement, and additional guards would have to be hired to provide adequate coverage. Secondly, lifeguards would have no control over who could wear personal flotation devices. If they were allowed at all, in all practicality, they must be allowed for all people. Children too small to wear preservers safely and older persons unable to swim would be at greatest risk of dangerous situations to occur.

In summary, though common sense seems to tell us that permitting personal flotation devices will save lives, to the contrary, information from experts and other research tells us that personal flotation devices create more danger than they alleviate.

The only exception to the rule is for handicapped persons who properly wear a Coast Guard approved personal flotation device and who are supervised on a one-on-one basis by an attendant.

(Information Source: Hennepin County Park District)

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INFORMATION SUPPORTING FLOTATION DEVICE RULE:

1. It is difficult for children to remain upright when wearing a flotation device for recreational swimming.
 - A. Children do not have weight in lower part of body to remain upright.
 - B. Children do not have strength & muscle control to remain upright.
 - C. Children do not have the knowledge to remain upright.
2. Personal flotation devices encourage a false sense of security.
 - A. Children will venture into deeper water.
 - B. Children lack ability to maneuver back to shallow water.
 - C. Children & parents become dependent on personal flotation devices.
 - D. Parents may not supervise children as closely or carefully.
 - E. Parents may leave children unattended.
3. There is no way to control who wears a personal floatation device or the type of device used.
 - A. No control over type, quality, buoyancy and fit.
 - B. No control over ability of individuals wearing flotation devices.
 - C. Difficult to enforce. Lifeguards would have to check each individual.